

STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES OF CHINA'S EXPANDING MARITIME POWER

BY

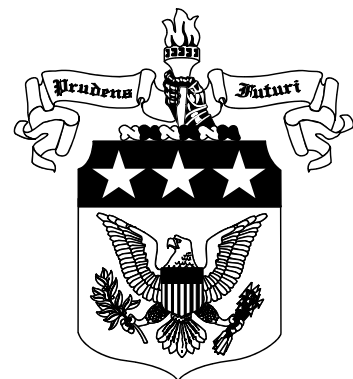
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES OF CHINA'S EXPANDING MARITIME POWER

by

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ABSTRACT

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China's increasing influence has surpassed that of an emerging power and now directly confronts the United States' (U.S.) interests within the Pacific and throughout the world. The People's Republic of China (PRC) ascendancy as a world power will be the greatest strategic challenge that faces the United States over the next century. Historically a major land power, China has embarked on a massive build-up of naval forces to counter U.S. maritime power in the region, provide security for her national economic interests, and demonstrate her political power throughout the region and the world. This naval expansion appears to go beyond simply challenging U.S. maritime capability; rather, this increase may be part of a complex plan of military expansion, economic development, and political hegemony. While China's rise to superpower status presents a broad range of national and international challenges and opportunities, a key insight into Sino ambitions may be obtained through careful analysis of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). These objectives have strategic consequences for the U.S., and America's response to these challenges will affect this nation's ability to compete economically, influence the region politically, and if necessary, respond militarily.

STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES OF CHINA'S EXPANDING MARITIME POWER

If China wishes to claim a leading role in international politics, it must become a sea power. Maritime strength is a fundamental part of global strategic leverage for any nation, but it is particularly important for the PRC.

—Colin S. Gray¹

China's increasing influence has surpassed that of an emerging power and now directly confronts the United States' (U.S.) interests within the Pacific and throughout the world. The People's Republic of China (PRC) ascendancy as a world power will be the greatest strategic challenge that faces the U.S. over the next century. While America's relationship with China is not analogous to the U.S.'s relationship with Soviet Union during the Cold War, China's rise is in no way benign to America's global interests.

Historically a major land power, China has embarked on a massive build-up of naval forces to counter U.S. maritime power in the region, provide security for her national economic interests, and demonstrate her political power throughout the region and the world. This naval expansion appears to go beyond simply challenging U.S. maritime capability; rather, this increase may be part of a complex plan of military expansion, economic development, and political hegemony in the western Pacific, potentially at the expense of the U.S. and other regional powers. The U.S. and the world community must manage China's expansion to ensure it comports to accepted international standards, both politically and economically.

While China's rise to superpower status presents a broad range of national and international challenges and opportunities, a key insight into Sino ambitions may be obtained through careful analysis of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). By

analyzing China in context of her current naval expansion, her political, economic, and military objectives become more apparent. Her objectives have strategic consequences for the U.S., and America's response to these challenges, in the long term, will affect our nation's ability to compete economically, influence the region politically, and if necessary, respond militarily.

Intuitively, people associate great international powers with their maritime capabilities. History suggests a direct correlation exists between great nations in terms of political, economic, and military power, and their navies. Consider the British Empire during their "Imperial Century" between 1815 and 1914. Britain's naval supremacy was always assured, since she continuously led the world in the number of major warships that bore her colors.² As a matter of scale, in 1913, Great Britain controlled approximately one quarter of the world's population, held over one quarter of the world's shipping capacity, and maintained control through naval supremacy and a series of bases stretching from Gibraltar to Hong Kong.³ Equivalently, the British Empire's aggregate Gross Domestic Product (GDP), during this period, was approximately 21 per cent of the world total,⁴ and no other country or empire in the history of the world (including the U.S.) has matched the United Kingdom's level of aggregate economic and resource capability.⁵

While intuition and historical examples make for an intriguing argument, it is somewhat specious because it deals with the effect of sea power, not the underlying principles of sea power itself. The subject was somewhat nebulous until Alfred Thayer Mahan published his seminal work, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*. In it, he provided politicians and strategists a basis to understand why nations

sought sea power, and consequently, became the father of the strategic maritime thought. Sea power, according to Mahan, was comprised of navies (battle fleets), merchant fleets, and the world wide base structure to support those fleets.⁶ Specifically, the American Admiral theorized there are military, economic, and political motives for nations to possess sea power,⁷ and by extension, large navies as a component of sea power, are the *sine qua non* of international power. While Mahan's work was ground breaking, one was still left with the circular argument, "do powerful nations construct powerful navies, or do powerful navies lead to powerful nations?" Nearly a century later, two authors would analyze the historical size of world navies and provide and correspondingly provide insight into the ramifications of a country's navy.

In 1988, George Modelski and William Thompson published *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494-1993*, which analyzed great nations and their navies. In their book, the authors indicated that it was not important when a nation developed a powerful navy, but that there was a correlation between nation-state leaders in world politics and international power and the size of that nation's navy.⁸ Their argument conceded that there were many factors that determined international prestige and power, but that the size and relative power of a country's naval forces was a decisive indicator of that power because it was an enabler of global reach and implementation.⁹ Based on their research, it is therefore possible to determine a nation's capacity to function and influence events internationally by analyzing the relative size of their naval forces.

The central question behind the recent Chinese naval expansion is not only why, but to what ends. Given the historical, theoretical, and analytical basis for large navies in conjunction with sea power, the underlying reasons are obvious. However, the

additional and more interesting questions are how large the expansion will be, what additional capability that will give to the Chinese government, and what does the PRC want to do with that capability? Dr. Phillip Saunders, in his National Defense University Occasional Paper, *China's Global Activism: Strategy, Drivers, and Tools*, indicated that "Chinese leaders are pursuing a long-term grand strategy based on maintaining a peaceful international environment that allows China to build the economic and technological foundations necessary to become a rich and powerful country."¹⁰

Since China desires to become a great international power or super power, the answer of why China is conducting such a large naval expansion is somewhat symbiotic; in order for them to achieve international power status, they must obtain a powerful navy and conversely, a powerful navy will enable them to become a powerful nation. However, the motivation to achieve the military, economic, and political benefits of naval power must be viewed from the Chinese point of view, i.e., through their national ambitions, capabilities, and limitations. Their world view is distinctly their own, and this international view manifests itself through the PLAN.

China's diplomatic priorities are ensuring territorial integrity and national sovereignty, broadening economic development, and increasing international respect and status.¹¹ While China's foreign policy uses these priorities as a foundation of their international actions, they are also influenced by three historical factors:

- China is reclaiming its status as a major regional and global power
- China has been victimized by Western Powers
- China continues to maintain a defensive outlook to maintain its autonomy¹²

As such, China's pressing political issues have traditionally had a landward, internal focus, but the international landscape has changed and been manipulated enough to afford them the ability to focus its attention seaward.¹³ China's current and future political challenges, security concerns, and economic issues are maritime in nature.¹⁴

Politically, China's current challenges are a perceived lack of international prestige, the U.S.'s challenge to Chinese interests, Taiwan's reunification issues, and maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. China's historical victimization at the hands of western powers (Europe, North America), combined with a diplomatic priority of increasing their country's international prestige and influence, has moved them to establish close bilateral ties with other nations.¹⁵ Maritime forces, in support of China's diplomatic efforts, provide a tangible reminder of the PRC's global capability. While having a large army is a powerful reminder of a country's capability, other nations, more specifically their citizens, are not able to easily view it, especially with regards to China, a traditionally closed society. A large and powerful naval fleet, conducting port visits and bilateral exercises throughout the world, provides a tangible reminder of national power. China's maritime influence is a substantial part of their foreign policy, because it has become a perceptible example of their global reach.

During the Cold War, China depended on the U.S. Navy to counter the threat posed by the Soviet Union; now, China believes that the U.S. has become a hindrance to their expansion in the Western Pacific.¹⁶ Within their strategic doctrine, they euphemistically refer to the U.S. as their chief political rival based on the current international situation.¹⁷ While there is a potential for military conflict, neither the U.S. nor China will designate the other as an enemy.¹⁸ However, Chinese leaders,

politicians, and strategists still “see the U.S. as a major potential threat to the PLA [People’s Liberation Army] and China’s interests primarily because of American military capabilities, but also because of U.S. security relationships in Asia.”¹⁹ As a matter of context, this is not implying that the relationship between the U.S. is heading toward belligerency, but rather, from the Chinese perspective, the biggest political challenge to their interests comes via U.S. maritime influences.

While China may view the U.S. as its greatest political threat and strategic rival, the differences between the two countries pale in comparison to China’s largest political issue – Taiwan, which can be considered the “essence of Beijing’s strategic concerns.”²⁰ This is a significant issue within mainland China, as they view any move toward Taiwanese independence as “posing a grave threat to China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.”²¹ While reunification with Taiwan is a political issue, it is most definitely naval in character because the solution to the problem for the foreseeable future is seen as military in nature. In this context, the primary mission of the PLAN would not be to safely transport invasion forces to Taiwan, but rather to prevent the U.S., or more specifically the U.S. Navy, from intervening.²²

China still faces continuing issues with their territorial claims in the East and South China Seas.²³ Within the first island chain that stretches from Malaysia north to Japan, China is involved in a variety of territorial disputes with other nations that surround the area that include the Spratly, Paracel, and Pratas Islands in the South China Sea, and the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.²⁴ The disputes are not relegated simply to national prestige; they involve natural resource (economic) and basing (military)

issues as well. For example, whoever controls the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea can exert a tremendous amount of influence in the area strictly from a territorial claim perspective. In addition, if the area is a rich deposit of natural resources, including oil, as predicted, this could be a significant strategic advantage, especially to China who is projected to import two-thirds of their oil requirement by 2030.²⁵

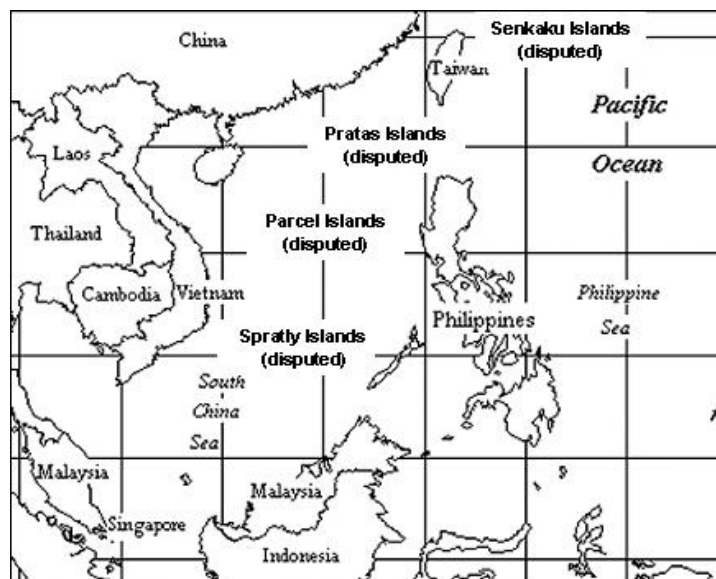


Figure 1: Disputed Island Chains in the South and East China Seas. Given the geography of the island chains surrounding China, the nation that controls these islands can assert territorial rights to a large portion of the maritime area, especially given the United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty that allows nations to claim a 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone.²⁶

China's economic aspirations are directly tied to their maritime capabilities, or more importantly, their ability to securely transfer goods by sea.²⁷ One estimate of China's maritime dependence indicates that approximately 50 percent of their economy is based on foreign trade, and 90 percent of that trade moves by ship.²⁸ The dominating factor in China's current and future economy will be the ability to acquire energy. Ensuring that uninterrupted supply will be critical, since the vast majority of energy resources will be gathered offshore or at a minimum transported by sea.²⁹ According to

the U.S. Department of Energy, today China consumes approximately 5.6 million barrels of oil per day, and for the next 30 years, this consumption rate is expected to increase three percent annually to 15 million barrels per day by 2030³⁰. China is and will be continually be dependent on imported oil,³¹ over half of which will come from the Arabian Gulf region of the Middle East.³² This dependence is a huge strategic vulnerability for China. That oil must flow through two of the world's major chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca, and must be protected in order to ensure a robust economy.³³ Currently, over 80 percent of Chinese oil products transit the Strait of Malacca every year.³⁴ The Strait of Hormuz is the single path out of the Arabian Gulf, and the U.S. Navy has historically demonstrated its ability to control that strategic chokepoint and manage the flow of oil through the strait.³⁵

In addition to maintaining the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in support of their economy, the PRC has other maritime security concerns within the region, including India and Japan as competitors.³⁶ India's location between China's oil supply in the Middle East and Africa is a strategic concern to China's interests³⁷. Despite their juxtaposition in Asia, there still is a maritime component that must be addressed by the PLAN if hostilities were to occur. Despite China's ability to engage Indian forces via a land war, China must still protect their oil flow at sea. In addition, given the historical belligerency between Japan and China, PRC strategists still believe that Japan is their greatest military threat.³⁸ The irony of the situation is that it has become a self-fulfilling argument. In order for Japan to unilaterally protect their economic interests, they must expand their Navy that correspondingly gives them a capability beyond national self-defense,³⁹ which causes concerns for the PRC and translates to their naval expansion.

While the U.S. Navy is not considered the greatest threat to Sino interests, its capability against Chinese military action is significant. The U.S. Navy's capability does not solely rest in the size of its substantial fleet. It is the combination of the fleet, security arrangements, and basing capabilities⁴⁰ that continually frustrates Chinese maritime strategists. From the Chinese perspective, the biggest hindrance to any military action preventing Taiwanese independence is the U.S. Navy.⁴¹ Some estimates indicate that it would take between fifty and sixty thousand troops to execute and sustain an amphibious assault on Taiwan,⁴² developing and sustaining the task to forcibly annex the island is a daunting challenge for the Chinese Navy.

Undoubtedly China has unique security challenges. These challenges, coupled with their economic concerns and political issues, have impacted an evolution in Chinese Naval doctrine to support their diplomatic priorities and current world view. Their doctrine, as well as other influences, has shaped PLAN missions and roles to develop a uniquely Chinese view of naval operations.

The PLAN has developed its own view of maritime power and doctrine. They have fashioned a maritime strategy to support their national interests by translating their strategic objectives, diplomatic priorities, and current concerns into specific missions to influence events through maritime power. From PLAN published writings, there are number of perspectives evident in their doctrine that influence how their maritime forces act in support of Chinese national priorities and interests. Specifically, the Chinese believe:

- That China's coastline is exposed and provides aggressors with a potential invasion route

- The sea provides defense in depth against invasion
- Naval battles are high technology conflicts
- The oceans are a maneuver space to influence events on land.⁴³

These core beliefs influence the strategy and doctrine to China's application of maritime power, and while the Chinese do follow some of the tenants of Mahan, they are not completely devoted to him. Although the Chinese have an impressive merchant fleet and are developing overseas bases to support their operations,⁴⁴ they are not pursuing a large battle fleet to engage enemies at sea⁴⁵ to conduct a fleet on fleet engagement for ultimate control of the ocean. Rather, China has adopted Maoist concept warfare by employing three tenants, namely: defending the shoreline, conducting at-sea guerilla warfare, and executing mobile war at sea.⁴⁶ To this end, they have incorporated Soviet doctrine of using the ocean in the strategic defense of the mainland and have moved their first line of defense from the coastline to off-shore areas, applicably naming this doctrine the "Two-Island Chain Strategy."⁴⁷

The Two-Island Chain Strategy, first published in the 1980s, divides the Western Pacific Ocean into three distinct zones and prescribes distinct objectives within each zone to further Chinese national objectives. This strategy supports Chinese core beliefs on the uses of maritime power and is a manifestation of a unique combination of Mahanian, Maoist, and Soviet doctrine. It also enables the Chinese to pursue their interests without provoking the U.S., as the strategy is defensive in nature and is geographically limited to the Western Pacific. On the surface, it can be construed as very non-threatening. In support of these beliefs and strategies, the PLAN has adopted five specific missions that it will undertake:

- Preparing for operations against Taiwan
- Defending Chinese territorial claims in the East and South China Seas
- Maintaining a strategic deterrent force against world and regional competitors (e.g., U.S., British Commonwealth, Japan, India)
- Protecting vital SLOCs
- Serving as a diplomatic force.⁴⁸



Figure 2: Geographic Depiction of China's Two-Island Chain Zones Within the first zone, PLA Naval Forces must achieve total sea control to facilitate friendly movement and deny enemy action. Within the second island chain, Chinese Naval Forces must deny the enemy the ability to operate. Outside the two chains, Chinese forces must detect and interdict enemy forces.⁴⁹

The PLAN believes that by executing these missions, they are supporting the strategic objectives of their government and are structuring their force in support of these missions. As such, this begs a central, strategic question; are the Chinese building a fleet and infrastructure that can sustain operations in support of these missions from their maritime strategy perspective, or are they developing a more powerful force that can coercively influence events regionally and around the world?

In order to determine if China is in fact building a navy that can implement their limited views of maritime power, it is important to analyze the capabilities of their fleet. The framing of that analysis is critical. In 1974, Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, as president of the Naval War College, published an article that expounded on the Chief of Naval Operations four main missions of the U.S. Navy. While the article was originally designed as a public dissertation on the *raison d'être* of the U.S. Navy during the Cold War (and has survived to form the basis of the most recent National Maritime Strategy⁵⁰), it serendipitously evolved into a profound analytical tool. These missions were not specific to the U.S. Navy; they were applicable to any navy and could provide a framework for evaluating the capabilities and limitations of a country's maritime power. In other words, while Mahan provided *why* nations sought naval power, Turner provided *how* naval power manifested itself in achieving the goals outlined by Mahan's theorized motivations. Specifically, Turner developed and detailed four main naval missions:⁵¹

- **Strategic deterrence** – nuclear ballistic missiles deployed at sea on nuclear powered submarines that deter major powers from going to war
- **Sea control** – denying the enemy the use of the ocean while facilitating friendly use
- **Naval presence** – patrolling national and international waters in a friendly or coercive manner
- **Power projection** – influencing events ashore by projecting force over land from the ocean.

By applying this lens to the Chinese Navy, it is possible to gain a more accurate and pragmatic view of the Navy and determine if China is building a fleet supporting their

publicly stated interests, or if they are building a fleet for other, perhaps more surreptitious reasons.

Strategic deterrence minimizes the likelihood that major powers will enter conflict with each other because the costs of that conflict would be too great for either side as compared to the potential gain from victory. Since the end of World War II, strategic deterrence has become a euphemism for deploying nuclear weapons. It has proven effective in deterring open war between major powers, e.g. the U.S. and Soviet Union. China's desire to obtain a modern, capable strategic deterrent at sea mirrors the same desires of the U.S. The U.S. touts its survivability of the ballistic-missile submarine fleet; these boats are maneuverable and stealthy, and complicate the tracking problem of a potential adversary by operating independently in the expanse of the ocean.⁵² The country that can employ these forces can quickly level the diplomatic playing field or gain political leverage because of the military power these vessels bring into play, even in small numbers.⁵³

China is just beginning to develop their strategic deterrent capability at sea. Currently, they have one operational nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), and one SSBN that is currently undergoing sea trials.⁵⁴ These submarines carry 12 and 16 missiles, respectively. In contrast, the U.S. Navy currently operates 14 Ohio class SSBNs,⁵⁵ each deploying 24 missiles capable of striking Chinese targets from the Pacific or Atlantic Oceans. While the U.S. has a decided advantage, it is not in the Chinese interests to directly challenge U.S. superiority or attempt to achieve parity. Provoking the U.S. into a strategic arms race at sea and diverting additional resources to maintain a credible deterrent are not in the Chinese interests. Nuclear weapons, even

in small numbers, are a credible deterrent, especially when deployed on a mobile, stealthy platform.

The deterrent numbers are decidedly in favor of the SSBN; it would take five attack submarines to effectively counter one SSBN operating in the open ocean.⁵⁶ In one scenario, it is entirely feasible for China to build eight SSBNs to ensure four would be deployed at any one time.⁵⁷ In this case, it would take almost the entire U.S. submarine Pacific Fleet to maintain an effective counter.⁵⁸ The mathematical calculation of force is self evident. China, with a small SSBN force, could occupy the entire Pacific Fleet submarine force. This small force would provide a low enough profile to remain unprovocative, but still provide a credible deterrent.

In the final analysis, it would be reasonable for China to develop and build between six and eight SSBNs to provide an adequate maritime strategic deterrent. The effect of the U.S.'s ability to deploy a robust ballistic missile interceptor capability and the use of conventional maritime forces will also factor into China's calculus on achieving a survivable deterrent force. However, China is still in the building stage of their SSBN program; the final numbers will be the deciding factor. Based on U.S. future capability, a program that produces about eight submarines would align with China's stated intentions. Any Chinese program that results in significantly more strategic submarines will be a clear indicator of desires beyond their stated intentions.

Sea control, with particular emphasis to support the Two-Island Chain Strategy, is a relevant indicator of Chinese intentions in the Pacific. Based on current information, the data indicates that for open ocean operations, the Chinese Navy has an extremely capable force.

	Surface Combatants (Cruiser, Destroyer/Frigate)	Attack Submarines (Nuclear/Diesel)
U.S. Pacific Fleet ⁵⁹	39 / 8	29 / 0
Chinese Navy	27 / 46 ⁶⁰	6 / 52 ⁶¹
U.S. Navy ⁶²	74 / 21	53 / 0

Table 1: Naval Assets in the Pacific Theater. Of the 58 submarines in the Chinese inventory, only 33 are considered front-line models. While the U.S. leads in cruisers and destroyers in the Pacific, the Chinese have more ships, specifically of smaller, less capable types. However, in total maritime power in support of the sea control mission, the U.S. still maintains a decided advantage.

On the surface, it would seem that China would be transitioning from a purely defensive, coastal defense Navy to one that is moving offshore to actively defend the mainland in support of their stated strategy. In addition, there are other factors that support Chinese assertions that they are building a fleet for defense:

- They have no modern, long range maritime strike aircraft. Their most capable aircraft were built circa 1960, and they are phasing them out⁶³
- With only six nuclear powered attack submarines, China's ability to conduct long range maritime interdiction is limited
- China only possesses three ocean going auxiliary fueling ships, which limits the range of their ships to patrol in the open ocean.⁶⁴

However, upon further analysis, there are some alarming trends and indicators beyond the realm of cursory examination.

The concern about the PLAN's capability to execute sea control missions is reflected in the current ship and submarine numbers, but rather in the rapidity that the PRC is constructing and modernizing their force. Currently, China is maintaining a three-to-one acquisition advantage as compared to the U.S. in submarines⁶⁵ and has demonstrated a willingness to procure these weapons internationally (KILo class from

Russia) and construct them internally (SHANG, YUAN class). In addition to procuring and constructing newer platforms at an alarming rate, they are also modernizing and recapitalizing their force,⁶⁶ with significant area denial, anti-ship capability. Submarines are particularly adept at denying specified areas and placing other military vessels at risk.⁶⁷ For the U.S., this obviously jeopardizes the U.S. Navy's ability to come to the defense of Taiwan, but more importantly, places Guam, Japan, the Philippines, and the Northern Marianas Islands at risk as well.

What China is constructing is a formidable maritime defensive network that is capable of denying any potential adversary the ability to operate within the first two island chains in addition to defending the mainland. Their effectiveness to aggressively deny access to the Philippine Sea and surrounding islands (Philippines, Japan, Taiwan) would make it almost impossible for the U.S. to respond rapidly against aggression and make the U.S. cost extremely high in any scenario that involves military action.⁶⁸ Given the numbers of ships and submarines that China has in their inventory, as well as the ongoing modernization program, China's maritime capability from the mainland to the Philippine Sea should cause concern. The key indicator will be looking holistically at China's procurement and modernization program; if China uses new procurement to modernize their force while retiring older platforms, then their chosen course of action is not as provocative. However, if China engages in a rapid build-up while retaining and modernizing older platforms, then that will signal a more aggressive stance that may require a U.S. response.

Naval presence is a softer means to meet a Navy's mission, but it plays no less an important role in any Navy's support of national interests. Naval presence has

traditionally been modeled under the term gunboat diplomacy, or more specific, the threat of naval force.⁶⁹ On the other hand, naval presence has evolved beyond the issue of implicitly or explicitly using force to one that includes ownership and control through operations at sea. Whether naval presence or gunboat diplomacy is the proper term is a matter of debate, however, what navies do for their countries under this rubric is not. The power to coerce, assure, or enforce is proportional to a nation's ability to control the sea, which is directly related to the numbers of ships that patrol the sea. The PLAN is the most visible implement of Chinese military diplomacy.⁷⁰ Its naval presence mission and its forays around the world continue to enhance the prestige of the PRC.

While China still retains the use of gunboat diplomacy in the traditional sense, they have actively pursued the use of the naval presence mission to reinforce their territorial claims within the South and East China Seas. Taiwan believes that China has increased their naval activity in the Taiwan Strait in order to make it a "Chinese Waterway."⁷¹ In 2005, China deployed a squadron of destroyers to a disputed gas field with Japan prior to negotiations with the Japanese government over territorial claims in the same area.⁷² As other nations assert their territorial rights in the South China Sea, China must deploy maritime power to the area in order to maintain control of the island and maintain the balance of power in the region.⁷³ China now maintains a continuous naval presence in the area, deploying combatant and auxiliary ships to monitor the archipelago in addition to their seven hardened military installations on the islands.⁷⁴ These actions, while maritime in execution, are political in nature and have become a favorite tactic of China to conduct unilateral diplomatic efforts within the region.

Projecting power is the final core competency in which China's Navy must become proficient. The ability to influence events on shore is based on the number and types of ships within the inventory and directly influences a nation's ability to influence events directly or coercively. Historically, China has not been able to conduct power projection operations from sea and it has not been a focus of effort for PRC naval planners. That concept may be changing. An aircraft carrier would fill gaps in their ability to conduct air defense and project power at sea, but it would be at a significant cost operationally, logistically, and financially.⁷⁵ As such, aircraft carrier opponents within the PLAN continue to press their position against these types of ships. Although their attempts to produce and operate an aircraft carrier are probably more political at this stage, the fact that they are contemplating carrier operations is a relevant issue and may be a start to counter U.S. dominance.⁷⁶

Amphibious operations have not traditionally been an area of Chinese expertise. However, since 1996, China has obtained over 20 medium size amphibious assault ships and has embarked on an ambitious building program of smaller vessels to facilitate amphibious missions.⁷⁷ In addition, the PLAN has launched and is fitting out a newer, larger amphibious ship that resembles the San Antonio class amphibious ship of the U.S. Navy. This ship is approximately 20,000 tons, operates helicopters, and accommodates air cushioned assault craft; it is a major enhancement to China's amphibious lift capacity and power projection capabilities.⁷⁸ It also signifies a provocative departure from a defense-oriented view of maritime sea power to something more offensive. Again, a cursory analysis of China's investment in amphibious capability would support the view that China has changed to a more offensive mindset. However,

what remains to be seen is how many of these ships China ultimately intends to produce. A small amphibious force that is modern and quick would indicate a focus on small, territorial claims in the South China Sea. A larger, more capable and modern force could be designed to militarily deal with Taiwan.

In the final analysis, the PLAN is a capable navy, at the cross-roads of development. They have a respectable regional sea control capability that is increasing in potential, an effective force to conduct naval presence, a limited capability to conduct strategic deterrence, and are still developing effective ability to project power ashore. Currently, China's objective seems to be transforming their Navy and other military entities into a force capable of waging short duration, high intensity conflict against capable adversaries without having to trade space for time.⁷⁹ What is also clear is that actions in China do bear further scrutiny to determine if the PLAN is simply consolidating their force or developing new, advanced capabilities.

The U.S.'s response to China's maritime expansion must be conducted in the context of facilitating China's involvement in the international system and making them a responsible partner in that system. Simply responding to China's naval expansion in kind would be an error in strategy because China's expanding Navy is not strictly a military issue but part of their natural emergence in the international order. H.D.S. Greenway summarizes this point best,

In time, another power will supersede America in technology, wealth, and power. At the moment, China is building a high-seas fleet that one day may challenge America's ability to influence events in the Far East. The trick will be to manage competition, and bring China ever closer into our accepted system of international norms rather than indulging in counterproductive hostility. The Navy is an indispensable guarantor of peaceful, strategic order, and because it doesn't require a physical

presence ashore, it can, in Theodore Roosevelt's words, 'speak softly' but still 'carry a big stick'.⁸⁰

For the U.S., there are political, military, and economic ramifications to China's naval expansion. Some of those ramifications will be symbiotic in nature and benefit both countries; as such, both countries should facilitate those issues. However, there will be ramifications that are not in the best interests of both countries. In these cases, the U.S. will need to respond appropriately.

Two issues that are symbiotic for both China and the U.S. are preventing an arms race and supporting globalization. If the political differences between the U.S. and China begin to deteriorate, then a new arms race between the two countries could occur that would include a significant maritime component. As evidenced by the relative economic data, both countries could not afford to be involved in an arms race with each other, although for different reasons. In China's case, while they rank 4th in the world in total GDP with an annual sum of about 2.6 trillion dollars, they are 129th in the world on a per capita basis.⁸¹ They cannot compete with the U.S., who leads the world in total GDP at over 13 trillion U.S. dollars.⁸² However, given the record deficits, current world situation, war on terror commitments, and, demographic changes, the U.S. cannot afford to begin another Cold War arms race without major economic impacts.

While the benefits of globalization can be argued, both countries are inextricably tied to globalization as the backbone for their economic survival. However, for globalization to flourish and expand, there are certain issues that must be addressed within the maritime environment. Specifically, for globalization to succeed, nations committed to the system must maintain good order and discipline in protecting commerce at sea while being able to effectively interact with each other.⁸³ When

perturbations occur to that order, the ability to jointly affect sea control among maritime nations is paramount to preserve the maritime trade engine of globalization. Protecting the maritime engine is not limited to events that occur on the world's oceans. To truly maintain order, maritime nations must be able to project power ashore to address challenges that also occur from land.⁸⁴

Both the U.S. and China have mutual interests in the Pacific region and throughout the world, and it behooves the U.S. to make China a member and responsible stakeholder within the international system, especially in the area of maritime issues.⁸⁵ For specific maritime issues, the U.S. might be better served in assuming a supporting role to the Chinese vice a leading role. If both countries address an issue without an ulterior motive in order to simply preserve international order, China, as a maritime nation, would be forced to demonstrate responsibility as an international power. By demonstrating their ability to altruistically lead on a particular maritime issue within their region of the world, they would gain respect and deference from the U.S. and the rest of the world for their efforts. Conversely, the world would view China less of a threat and more of a partner in the international order.

Here lies the great conundrum for the U.S. In order for China to become an active and participant member and stakeholder of the international community, they must expand their Navy to support the tenants of globalization. However, the current expansion being conducted by the Chinese is being viewed with a great deal of suspicion by the U.S., and this suspicion is moving both countries toward a more belligerent relationship.⁸⁶ This suspicion, as well as the U.S.'s strategic culture of the need for absolute superiority, is inappropriate for the modern, globalized world. That is

not to indicate that there are certain boundaries that will and should remain inviolate, but those boundaries must be constructed and maintained within the context of a new order. The U.S. should accept its new place in that order.

The U.S. ought to accept that American dominance is not a precondition for international involvement.⁸⁷ America has to be willing to assume a supporting role vice our traditional role of leadership in any military operation or diplomatic effort we undertake. We must accept the ascendancy of peer competitors, especially China. In addition to undertaking a more cooperative role in international missions, the U.S. should also realize that the Navy cannot be everywhere, in force, all the time. Since “presence does not automatically garner sea control,”⁸⁸ the U.S., via the U.S. Navy, must conduct a paradigm shift in the traditional implementation of naval power. The U.S. Navy is obliged to now selectively make its presence felt in the areas around the world that have a direct impact on its national interests.⁸⁹

While the U.S., and more directly, the U.S. Navy, cannot maintain a militarily and economically unchallenged position throughout the world, there are still actions being conducted by the Chinese that require a measured response. In order to counter-balance Chinese naval expansion, the U.S. should modestly alter force disposition and structure in the Pacific Fleet. It has begun to do this by implementing the recommendations of the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. This would serve prudence in maintaining parity in the region without the side effects of a massive, rapid naval expansion that would be counter-productive to both countries.

In 1995, there were 87 combatant ships (excluding submarines) in the Pacific Fleet capable of conducting an effective naval presence mission.⁹⁰ Consequently, a

RAND study at the time indicated that U.S. Naval presence in the Pacific had already been reduced by half and that there were not enough naval forces in the area to effectively conduct the naval presence mission.⁹¹ Today, in the Pacific Fleet, there are only 72 combatant ships (excludes submarines) capable of conducting the naval presence within the area.⁹² Given the size of the Pacific Ocean, the demand of naval forces in central Asia, and the multi-polar nature of the Pacific Ocean, there just are not enough ships to meet the demands of this mission area to effectively counter Chinese efforts. Currently, there are 280 ships in commission,⁹³ well below the stated goal of 313 the U.S. Navy has indicated it needs as a minimum.⁹⁴ While achieving a ship count of 313 active vessels is proceeding in the correct direction, studies have indicated that 313 ships may not be enough.⁹⁵

In a recent study conducted by the U.S. Navy, a recommendation was offered that the U.S. Navy could, under some circumstances and mission scenarios, require over 500 ships.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that the report was officially dismissed as being unrealistic in its final conclusions, the underlying premise of “more ships” was substantiated. Additionally, these vessels do not need to be multi-billion dollar floating fortresses, because the right mix of vessels (high end / low end) is just as important as the number to meet the naval presence mission while not increasing Chinese anxiety. More ships are a prudent measure, but a lot more ships that execute a wide variety of missions would be counter-productive. Granted, all of these ships must be capable, but it would be wiser to develop an open-ocean sea control ship that gives up some capability and focuses specifically on maritime warfare and sea control.

In addition to building more ships, the U.S. should consider re-apportioning the force between the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. Currently, there is an approximate 50/50 split between the two fleets within the U.S. Navy;⁹⁷ however, a more strategic allocation would be extending the 60/40 split of submarines and aircraft carriers outlined in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review⁹⁸ across the entire U.S. Navy in the direction of the Pacific Fleet. While current force levels between the Chinese Navy and American Pacific Fleet are about equal⁹⁹, a U.S. force shift would effectively enhance our ability to conduct sea control and naval presence missions without altering the overall maritime force balance. This shift, combined with a modest increase in the total number of combat vessels, could maintain the balance of power in the favor of the U.S. and provide an effective check on the PRC's ambitions in the area. By pursuing this course of action, the U.S. would enhance its ability to execute sea control missions, maintain deterrence, and conduct naval presence operations without causing unnecessary Chinese anxiety.

What the U.S. does with the ships in the Pacific Fleet will be just as important as how many and what types of ships it operates there. The U.S. Navy cannot cover the scope and depth of all naval missions. Given the current nature of the international and domestic environments, there is one fundamental conclusion, that the U.S. Navy cannot be all things to all people.¹⁰⁰ In addition to picking the areas and situations in which to intervene, the U.S. Navy must now determine what critical missions it must undertake, including how much depth and breadth should be covered by the U.S. Navy within those mission areas. This determination should be considered in the context of the long,

strategic view. Once a decision is made, implementation should occur immediately at the expense of current operations not aligned with the long term strategy.

In the context of redefining missions in order to provide a framework to support national objectives in the future, the U.S. Navy should:

1. Gradually decrease its involvement in land operations in support of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns and re-allocate those resources back to and in direct support of fleet operations.
2. As a consequence of globalization and in response to China's naval expansion, shift training and resource allocations away from expeditionary, power projection, and littoral operations back to traditional sea control missions.
3. Maintain forward presence operations even at the expense of involvement in domestic efforts.

These tenants would shift the U.S. Navy back to its traditional roles and rely on allies and other departments within the U.S. government to maintain capabilities in the areas the leadership consciously decides to remove from the missions the Navy executes.

The U.S. should increase the level of engagement with the Chinese and other nations within the region to ensure transparency in U.S. actions while attempting to gain insights on PLAN actions. Port calls, official visits, and bilateral exercises can enhance the relationship with the Chinese Navy and national governments and provide a method to diffuse tensions. In addition, an up close and personal exercise can demonstrate U.S. maritime power in a non-threatening manner to further sow doubt in the minds of the Chinese leadership about their relative maritime strength to U.S. naval power in the region.

If engagement and bilateral interaction on an international scale does not work, and China becomes more belligerent in their international actions, the U.S. could consider a political/military alliance with like minded nations of the Pacific to thwart Chinese aggression. The U.S. should further its already strong relationship with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and the other nations in the area as a check to China's belligerency. These relationships could provide the foundation of a Western Pacific alliance analogous to NATO. While the Chinese Navy's chief competitor is the U.S., with a strong U.S. alliance in the Pacific, China must continually factor naval assets and capabilities from their surrounding neighbors, especially those friendly to the U.S. A strong, regularly exercised alliance, or coalition, will help neutralize Chinese regional hegemony through military and diplomatic means.

Based on China's ascendancy as a world power, the U.S. must be willing to alter its strategic paradigms in the international order. By facilitating areas of common interest, accepting a fundamental change in the international framework, strategically expanding the U.S. Navy, redefining the traditional roles of the U.S. Navy, and maintaining a high level of engagement with the Chinese, the U.S. can manage the transition of China into the international system. From China's perspective, they wish to become a more influential part of the international community, unlike the Soviet Union who wished to overthrow it.¹⁰¹ In addition, they have publicly indicated that they seek peaceful development without causing anxiety to regional neighbors or global partners. However, they do want recognition of their global influence and acceptance of their expanded roles in the international system.¹⁰² In response, it would be prudent for the U.S. to pursue a course of diplomatic and military actions that will facilitate China's

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